

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 5070

LIMDIS

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TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJECT: INCIDENT AT MOSCOW SYNAGOGUE

REFS: (A) MOSCOW 4379 (B) STATE 81343

1. SUMMARY: EMBOFF WAS OBSERVER OF MARCH 29 SYNAGOGUE INCIDENT AND IS CERTAIN THAT MILITIA ENTERED MOSCOW SYNAGOGUE BUILDING, BUT BECAUSE OF HIS VANTAGE POINT CANNOT SAY HOW FAR INTO BUILDING THEY PROCEEDED. IN ANY CASE, SYNAGOGUE'S "STATUS" WAS CLEARLY VIOLATED. DETENTE AND CONCERN FOR SOVIET IMAGE ABROAD DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY THOSE ORGANIZING THE ACTIONS AT THE SYNAGOGUE, BUT SEEM TO HAVE BEEN VERY MUCH IN THE FOREFRONT WHEN IT WAS DECIDED TO PASS THE WORD WESTWARD ABOUT ASSURANCES OF THE SYNAGOGUE'S "INVIOLEATE" STATUS. THE INCIDENT COULD HAVE A BENEFICIAL EFFECT IF MILITIA BEHAVIOR AT THE SYNAGOGUE IS MITIGATED IN THE FUTURE AS A RESULT OF CONCERN EXPRESSED IN THE WEST. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING IS FULL ACCOUNT BY EMBOFF WHO WAS PRESENT DURING MARCH 29 INCIDENT AT MOSCOW CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE.

3. EMBOFF ARRIVED AT SYNAGOGUE SHORTLY BEFORE NOON WHILE SERVICE WAS STILL IN PROGRESS. LARGE CROWD WAS GATHERED ON
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STEPS AND UPPER PLATFORM OF BUILDING LEADING TO ENTRANCE BECAUSE

MILITIAMEN WERE NOT ALLOWING GROUPS TO GATHER ON SIDEWALKS AROUND SYNAGOGUE. (AS USUAL, MANY JEWS PRESENT DID NOT COME FOR RELIGIOUS SERVICE, BUT RATHER TO TALK WITH FRIENDS, EXCHANGE INFORMATION, ETC. IT IS NORMAL ON SATURDAYS AND HOLIDAYS FOR LARGE NUMBER OF JEWS TO GATHER IN GROUPS ON SIDEWALKS UNTIL LATE AFTERNOON.) EMBOFF WORKED HIS WAY THROUGH CROWD UP THE STEPS AND STOOD ON UPPER ENTRANCE WAY, SINCE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO ENTER SYNAGOGUE BECAUSE OF CRUSH OF PEOPLE. ALL THE WHILE MILITIA WERE HARANGUING CROWD WITH AMPLIFIED BULLHORNS, ORDERING THEM TO MOVE ON, BUT WITH LITTLE SUCCESS. CROWD WAS PARTIALLY DEFIANT, PARTIALLY PHLEGMATIC, AND WITH MILITIA BELLOWING DIRECTLY INTO THEIR FACES, MOST WERE CLEARLY DETERMINED NOT TO LEAVE.

4. WHEN SERVICE BROKE UP AT APPROXIMATELY 1230, WORSHIPPERS INSIDE SYNAGOGUE BEGAN TO SPILL OUT OF SIDE DOOR (LARGE MAIN DOORS REMAINED CLOSED), PUSHING MANY OF THOSE STANDING IN OUTSIDE ENTRY WAY AND ON STEPS ONTO SIDEWALKS. MILITIA BULLHORN BELLOWING INCREASED AND SOME JEWS BEGAN TO WALK SLOWLY DOWN THE STREET. AT THAT POINT, EMBOFF WALKED UPSTREET AWAY FROM SYNAGOGUE AND NOTED GROUPS OF UNIFORMED MILITIA GATHERED IN ALLEYS AND COURTYARDS IN IMMEDIATE AREA. EMBOFF OBSERVED FROM APPROXIMATELY 100 YARDS AWAY, AS GROUPS OF ABOUT TEN MILITIA AT A TIME WERE SENT DOWN STREET SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER TO MOVE PEOPLE ON SIDEWALKS AWAY FROM BUILDING. THIS WAS REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES TO ENSURE THAT SIDEWALKS WERE KEPT CLEAR. NUMBER OF JEWS CONTINUED TO STAND ON STEPS, ENTRY WAY, AND INSIDE SYNAGOGUE, HOWEVER. EMBOFF THEN WALKED DOWN OPPOSITE SIDE OF STREET UNTIL HE WAS STANDING DIRECTLY ACROSS FROM BUILDING WITH GROUP OF ABOUT 50 WHO HAD ALSO CROSSED STREET. MILITIA USED SAME TACTIC ON THIS GROUP AND BEGAN TO MOVE IT SLOWLY DOWN THE STREET, AWAY FROM SYNAGOGUE

5. AT THIS POINT (ABOUT 1315), MILITIA APPARENTLY IMPATIENT WITH NON-MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE FROM STEPS AND INSIDE SYNAGOGUE, FORCED THEIR WAY TO TOP OF STEPS AND BEGAN PUSHING CROWD DOWNWARD ONTO SIDEWALK IN ORDER TO EMPLOY SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER TECHNIQUE AGAIN. THERE WERE SEVERAL SCUFFLES ON STEPS AND SIDEWALKS.

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6. MILITIA ALSO SIMULTANEOUSLY BEGAN TO WORK ON THOSE WHO WERE STILL INSIDE SYNAGOGUE, AND THIS IS WHEN ENTRY WAS MADE. EMBOFF IS CERTAIN MILITIA ENTERED BUILDING, AT LEAST INTO FIRST VESTIBULE PAST SIDE DOOR. SINCE HE WAS NOT INSIDE SYNAGOGUE AT THE TIME AND BUILDING'S COLUMNS PARTIALLY OBSCURED VIEW FROM STREET, EMBOFF CANNOT BE CERTAIN HOW FAR INSIDE BUILDING MILITIA ADVANCED OR WHETHER ALLEGATIONS ARE TRUE THAT MILITIA

ACTUALLY ENTERED HALL OF WORSHIP. MILITIA USED BULLHORNS DIRECTED INTO SYNAGOGUE FROM SIDE DOOR AND VESTIBULE TO GET PEOPLE OUT OF THE BUILDING, MOVE THEM ONTO SIDEWALKS AND PUSH THEM DOWN THE STREET. BUILDING AND STEPS WERE FINALLY CLEARED AND IRON GATES IN FRONT OF BUILDING WERE LOCKED SO THAT NO ONE COULD STAND ON STEPS.

7. AS INDICATED IN PREVIOUS REPORTING, BEHAVIOR OF MILITIA WAS NASTIER THAN ON ANY RECENT OCCASION. EMBOFF NOTED SEVERAL OLD LADIES CRYING, AND NUMBER OF ANGRY JEWS WERE GRUMBLING ABOUT "FASCIST" AND "ANTI-SEMITES." GENERAL FEELING WAS THAT MILITIA ACTION WAS CRUDE, UNCALLED FOR, UNPROVOKED, AND DONE WITH INTENTION OF FRIGHTENING JEWS AND TEACHING THEM SOME KIND OF LESSON.

8. COMMENT: REGARDING TANDEITNIK-SCHNEIER TELEPHONE CONVERSATION: (A) "INVIOLE STATUS OF SYNAGOGUE" IS A MYTH. MILITIA CONTINUALLY VIOLATE SYNAGOGUE'S STATUS AS PLACE OF WORSHIP, PARTICULARLY ON HOLIDAYS BY (A) USE BY MILITIA OF BULLHORNS WHICH SEEM TO GET LOUDER EACH TIME THEY ARE EMPLOYED AND WHICH CAN BE HEARD INSIDE BUILDING WHILE PRAYERS ARE BEING SAID; (B) ENTRY OF MILITIA ONTO SYNAGOGUE STEPS TO FORCE THOSE CONGREGATED DOWNWARD ONTO SIDEWALKS, WHICH HAS HAPPENED BEFORE; (C) MILITIA PLOY OF ROUTING TRAFFIC PAST SYNAGOGUE BY BLOCKING OFF CROSS STREET FOR "REPAIRS," WHICH ONLY SEEM TO OCCUR ON JEWISH HOLIDAYS; (D) ON THIS OCCASION, ACTUAL ENTRY OF MILITIA INTO BUILDING. (AS WITH RAPE, THE SLIGHTEST PENETRATION WOULD CONSTITUTE A VIOLATION. WOULD BE INTERESTING TO KNOW IF TANDEITNIK WAS MERELY CLAIMING THAT WORSHIP HALL WAS NOT ENTERED, WHICH MAY BE TRUE.) (B) DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE AWARE THAT PRESIDENT OF SYNAGOGUE IS WIDELY ASSUMED BY MEMBERS OF CONGREGATION, NOT ONLY BY JEWISH ACTIVISTS, TO BE "KGB MAN," I.E., TO BE WORKING HAND IN GLOVE WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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AUTHORITIES. TANDEITNIK SUDDENLY WAS INSTALLED WITHOUT NOTICE AS NEW SYNAGOGUE PRESIDENT AROUND BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, BUT NO ONE SEEMS TO KNOW HOW TANDEITNIK WAS CHOSEN, OR WHERE HE WAS BEFORE. ONE OF PRESIDENT'S MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES APPARENTLY IS TO ASSURE FOREIGN VISITORS OF FAVORABLE SITUATION OF MOSCOW JEWRY. (C) RE PARA FIVE OF REFTEL B, WE WILL TRY TO FIND SUITABLE OCCASION TO INFORM RABBI FISHMAN OF APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE CONCERN, BUT DEPARTMENT SHOULD NOTE THAT RABBI, TOO, IS SUSPECT BY CONGREGATION, MAINLY FOR LACK OF CREDENTIALS AND KNOWLEDGE OF HEBREW RITUALS. FISHMAN, WHO APPARENTLY HAD RABBINICAL TRAINING EARLY IN LIFE (HE NOW IS IN HIS SIXTIES), IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN WORKING AS A NIGHT WATCHMAN IN A FACTORY WHEN HE WAS INSTALLED AS RABBI. STOESEL

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